

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 BEIRUT 02626 01 OF 02 110848Z
ACTION NEA-11

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15
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P R 101448Z MAY 78
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7922
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BEIRUT 2626

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT LE
SUBJ: CABINET CIRCUS CONTINUES

1. SUMMARY. LEBANON TODAY BEGINS ITS THIRD WEEK WITHOUT A GOVERNMENT. PRINCIPAL OBSTACLE CONTINUES TO BE CAMILLE CHAMOUN, WHO IN RECENT DAYS HAS BEEN INSISTING ON AN ALL-PARLIAMENTARY GOVERNMENT, WHICH WOULD EXCLUDE THE REPRESENTATIVES OF LEFTIST PARTIES AND ALSO SOME SYRIAN FRIENDS. CHAMOUN'S POSITION HAS ENGENDERED RIGHT WING-LEFT WING POLEMIC, WITH THE FORMER INSINUATING THE LATTER IS UNPATRIOTIC, AND THE LATTER ACCUSING THE FORMER OF SEEKING TO IMPOSE A "PHALANGIST-NLP DICTATORSHIP." PRIME MINISTER-DESIGNATE HOSS AND PRESIDENT SARKIS ARE TAKING THEIR TIME. MOST LIKELY OUTCOME AT THIS POINT WOULD SEEM TO BE A FAIRLY LARGE CABINET WITH BOTH PARLIAMENTARY AND NON-PARLIAMENTARY ELEMENTS, INCLUDING ONE OF THE CHAMOUN SONS. SHEIKH MICHELE KHOURY IS NOW BEING BRUITED ABOUT
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PAGE 02 BEIRUT 02626 01 OF 02 110848Z

AS POSSIBLE DEFENSE MINISTER. END SUMMARY.

2. CAMILLE CHAMOUN HAS SEIZED THE SPOTLIGHT IN CABINET DELIBERATIONS. AFTER REFUSING TO PAY A CALL ON HOSS (PROTESTING THAT HOSS HAD ACTED IMPROPERLY IN PAYING HIS OWN FIRST CALL ON THE GRAND MUFTI AFTER BEING DESIGNATED TO FORM A CABINET), CHAMOUN DID SEE HOSS AND

ALSO PRESIDENT SARKIS ON MAY 8. HE ALSO MET THAT EVENING WITH NATIONAL LIBERAL PARTY POLITICAL COUNCIL. CHAMOUN AFTERWARDS TOOK NEGATIVE LINE WITH THE PRESS, SAYING HIS MEETING WITH HOSS "DID NOT ARRIVE AT ANY POSITIVE RESULTS." HE REPEATED HIS DEMAND FOR A CABINET MADE UP ENTIRELY OF MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT WHICH WOULD "INSPIRE CONFIDENCE AMONG THE PEOPLE."

3. PHALANGE LEADER PIERRE GEMAYEL HAS BEEN PLAYING A CLOSE SECOND FIDDLE TO CHAMOUN. CHAMOUN HIMSELF SAID THAT GEMAYEL SHARED HIS VIEW THAT THE CABINET SHOULD BE "PARLIAMENTARY AND HONESTLY LEBANESE" (BY WHICH HE MEANT THAT THE PATRIOTISM OF LEFTIST POLITICAL LEADERS WAS QUESTIONABLE AND THAT THEY SHOULD THEREFORE BE EXCLUDED FROM THE KABINET). THE ELDER GEMAYEL REVIVED HIS STANDARD CRITICISMS OF "COMMUNIST AND FOREIGN AGITATORS," BUT, IN A LENGTHY PRESS DECLARATION MAY 9, EMPHASIZED THE IMPORTANCE OF A STRONG GOVERNMENT WHICH WOULD BE ABLE TO EFFECT NATIONAL RECONCILIATION. LEBANESE FRONT LEADERS ARE SCHEDULED TO MEET MAY 10 AND ISSUE A COMPREHENSIVE STATEMENT ON THE CURRENT SITUATION.

4. LEFT-RIGHT POLEMIC. IN RESPONSE TO CHAMOUN'S SLURS ON THEIR PATRIOTISM AND DEMANDS FOR AN ALL-PARLIAMENTARY CABINET (WHICH WOULD VIRTUALLY EXCLUDE ANY LEFT WING PARTY REPRESENTATIVES), BOTH THE NATIONAL CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 BEIRUT 02626 01 OF 02 110848Z

MOVEMENT (WALID JUMBLATT) AND THE "NATIONAL FRONT" OF KAMAL SHATILLA ISSUED SHARPLY CRITICAL STATEMENTS MAY 9. THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT ACCUSED THE LEBANESE FRONT OF TRYING TO ESTABLISH A "DICTATORSHIP" OF THE NATIONAL LIBERAL PARTY AND THE PHALANGE, AND IGNORING AUTHENTIC NATIONAL RECONCILIATION, WHICH SHOULD INCLUDE REPRESENTATION OF THE LEFT. KAMAL SHATILLA, SPEAKING FOR HIS "NATIONAL FRONT," SAID "THE NATIONALIST PEOPLE OF LEBANON ARE THE ONE WHO MUST DECIDE WHO SHOULD OR SHOULD NOT BE IN A POSITION OF OFFICIAL POWER AND THEY WILL DO SO WITHOUT THE ADVICE OF THE FRONTS AND THE GROUPS AND COMMITTEES WHICH HAVE NAMED THEMSELVES THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THIS FREE PEOPLE." HE SAID THAT "ILLEGAL AND IRRESPONSIBLE GROUPS" (ALLUDING TO THE CHRISTIAN MILITIAS) SHOULD BE BROUGHT UNDER THE AUTHORITY OF THE STATE. FORMER PRIME MINISTER RASHID KARAME JOINED IN, ACCUSING THE LEBANESE FRONT OF SEEKING TO HAVE THE MOSLEM COMMUNITY OF LEBANON REPRESENTED BY THOSE WHO HAD FOUGHT AGAINST THEM. HE CALLED THE CONTINUING CABINET CRISIS A "THEATER PLAYED TO COVER THE CONTINUING CONSPIRACY, WHICH IS TAKING ON DIFFERENT GUISES."

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PAGE 01 BEIRUT 02626 02 OF 02 110710Z
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BEIRUT 2626

5. HOSS: CALM IN THE CENTER OF THE STORM. IN THE MIDST OF THE SHOUTING MATCH, PRIME MINISTER HOSS IS MAINTAINING AN UNFLAPPABLE, NONCOMMITTAL AND PROFESSIONALLY OPTIMISTIC POSITION. ON MAY 6, HOSS TOLD THE PRESS THAT FORMATION OF THE GOVERNMENT HAD TAKEN LONGER THAN HE HAD ORIGINALLY EXPECTED, BUT, "WE WILL ADOPT SOME SOLUTION AT THE PROPER TIME AND WILL NOT LEAVE THE COUNTRY IN THIS VICIOUS CIRCLE MUCH LONGER." AFTER MEETING WITH CHAMOUN ON MAY 8, HE SPOKE OF "POSITIVE RESULTS." HE SAID IT WAS TOO SOON TO SAY WHETHER THE CABINET WOULD BE PARLIAMENTARY OR NON-PARLIAMENTARY.

6. DESPITE THE PUBLIC POLEMICS, IT APPEARS THAT HOSS IS GRADUALLY WORKING OUT A FORMULA FOR A CABINET WHICH WILL NOT BE DOMINATED BY CHAMOUN, BUT WHICH HE WILL ACCEPT. CHIEF OF PRESIDENTIAL PROTOCOL KHALIL HADDAD TOLD EMBOFF MAY 10 THAT HE THOUGHT THAT CHAMOUN WOULD NOW ACCEPT THE PRESENCE OF EITHER OF HIS SONS, DANY OR
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 BEIRUT 02626 02 OF 02 110710Z

DORY, IN THE CABINET IN LIEU OF HIMSELF. HADDAD THOUGHT THAT SHEIKH MICHELE KHOURY (WHO HAS BEEN MENTIONED IN RECENT MONTHS AS A POSSIBLE NEXT LEBANESE AMBASSADOR TO THE UNITED STATES, AND WHOSE NAME HAS BEGUN TO APPEAR IN PRESS SPECULATIONS AS A POSSIBLE CABINET MINISTER) MIGHT WELL BE THE NEXT MINISTER OF DEFENSE. HADDAD REPEATED THE WIDESPREAD EXPECTATION THAT FOUAD BOUTROS WOULD BE RENAMED AS FOREIGN MINISTER.

7. BY THIS TIME, EVERYBODY WHO IS ANYBODY HAS BEEN MENTIONED AS A POSSIBLE MINISTER, AND THEN SOME. SHIA NLP DEPUTY KASIM KHALIL ACCORDING TO ONE STORY HAS PROPOSED HIS YOUNG SON KARIM, PERHAPS JUST TO KEEP UP WITH THE GEMAYELS AND THE CHAMOUNS. CHAMOUN REPORTEDLY TOLD KHALIL THAT HE WAS PROPOSING THE NAME OF ELIAS HANASH, LEADING NLP GUNFIGHTER IN AYN AR-RUMMANAH.

8. WE CANNOT PREDICT WITH ANY CONFIDENCE WHEN THE CABINET MIGHT FINALLY BE ANNOUNCED. OBJECTIVE CIRCUMSTANCES, WE THINK, SUGGEST AN ANNOUNCEMENT SOONER (THIS WEEK) RATHER THAN LATER, BUT SARKIS AND HOSS SEEM DETERMINED TO TAKE THEIR TIME. THERE IS A CERTAIN VIRTUE IN KEEPING THE BETTING OPEN: SINCE THE RESIGNATION OF THE CABINET ON APRIL 19, AND WITH THE SINGLE EXCEPTION OF THE FLAREUP IN AYN AR-RUMMANAH THE NIGHT OF MAY 5-6 (WHICH WAS QUICKLY BROUGHT UNDER CONTROL), BEIRUT HAS BEEN FAIRLY QUIET. ONE OF THE GIVENS OF THE SITUATION IS THAT AMIN GEMAYEL WILL BE A CABINET MINISTER, THE PRINCIPAL PHALANGE REPRESENTATIVE IN THE GOVERNMENT. THIS SITUATION GIVES BOTH PIERRE GEMAYEL AND BASHIR GEMAYEL AN INCENTIVE TO KEEP THEIR MILITIA ON A TIGHT LEASH

9. OUR GUESS AT THIS POINT IS THAT SARKIS AND HOSS WILL NOT ACCEDE TO THE MAXIMALIST CHAMOUNIST DEMANDS, AND WILL
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PAGE 03 BEIRUT 02626 02 OF 02 110710Z

BRING IN BOTH SOME LEFTISTS AND SOME SYRIAN FRIENDS. THE WAITING GAME MAY BE IN LARGE PART A TACTIC BY SARKIS AND HOSS TO LET CHAMOUN'S DRIVE RUN OUT OF STEAM. THEY MAY BE COUNTING ON GROWING DISAFFECTION AMONG MARONITES WITH THE STYLE OF CHAMOUN'S LEADERSHIP. LANE

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